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# LAWS ARE LAUGHED AT

Sanitary Regulations Go  
Unheeded.

## AN EXPERT ON THE SUBJECT

He Holds Defective Plumbing and  
Careless Building Responsible  
For Health Conditions.

Honolulu's health is solely a matter of the establishment and enforcement of proper sanitary building laws. So says a Honolulu whose long residence, special education and practical experience make him perhaps better qualified to speak on the matter than anyone else. He pronounces a scathing criticism on the present plumbing regulations and upon the laxity of those whose business it is to compel the carrying out of the rules laid down by the Board of Health.

This gentleman after a week's careful consideration of the subject consented to give his views, reserving his name from publication. If his identity were disclosed his right to speak authoritatively would not be disputed.

Need of Sanitary Standard.

"No time could be riper," said he yesterday, "for a statement of Honolulu's need of correct rules for building and plumbing work. A man with half an eye, if familiar in the slightest degree with right and wrong, cannot but wonder at the absolute disregard of them in most of the construction past and present in Honolulu. Almost every canon known to the modern sanitary engineer, plumber or builder is broken daily by those now erecting houses or planning them for the future."

"When the last of January threatened by a plague epidemic, those at the head of the Government were spurred on to check by all possible means the spread of the plague, some twenty-nine sanitary regulations were passed by the Board of Health. In spite of the object lesson then and still before their eyes few of these regulations are not entirely slighted by those for whose guidance they were particularly drawn. The public health is endangered by this disregard of the law and no step is taken toward the creation of that general sanitary condition which alone can make Honolulu free from epidemics and give it that health status to which its magnificent climate and natural surroundings entitle it."

The Regulations Passed.

"These twenty-nine regulations by the Board of Health are supposed to embrace the whole range of needful precautions and are to govern the entire built-up city. I don't want to speak in a disparaging manner merely to find fault without pointing out a remedy. I shall not be able to go into all the sections of the Board's regulations. To make a start let us consider section 4, which is as follows:

"Every building shall have on an average at least twenty inches of clear space for the circulation of air between the floor timbers and the ground, and shall have sufficient openings for ventilation in the outer walls to admit a free circulation of air; but, in case this space cannot be secured without reaching 'ground water level' then there shall be no air space, but the floor shall be of concrete or masonry."

"There is a dispute by those disposed to evade the spirit of the regulations as to whether the sills of buildings are required to be twenty inches from the ground or only the floor timbers. There is no doubt that the framers of the section intended it to mean that the sills themselves must be twenty inches from the soil. On Liliha street, to cite specific instances, there are some buildings which while twenty inches above the ground on which they are built, yet laugh at every healthful rule for the reason that this ground is over twenty inches below the street level, making proper drainage impossible. Other buildings in the same vicinity on Liliha street do not comply at all with the regulation."

To Avoid Disease.

"To avoid the conditions which made possible the spread of the bubonic plague, all property should be graded to some street so that proper drainage may be obtained. The lack of this proper drainage together with the shocking plumbing systems in many houses, is, in my opinion, accountable for the persistence of the plague. To make effective section 4, and to obtain the results aimed at by the section's framers, there should be provision for insuring the correct grading of all lots before building operations are permitted to begin. As it is in many cases, while ostensibly complying with the requirements, many buildings are erected under astonishingly insanitary conditions, being often below the street grade so that not only does the seepage from adjoining buildings accumulate under them but also the water from the street itself."

"A building on the mauka side of Beretania near Punchbowl street illustrates a common fault. It is, as are hundreds now built, building or planned. The ground on which it stands is below the street grade and afterward the surrounding land was filled in to conform. The result is that this Beretania street house is now in a depression of eighteen inches, in which collects all the moisture from the neighboring land and the health both of the family living in the house and of those in the vicinity is seriously menaced. No building should be allowed to be erected unless the foundation stones are above the legal grade contemplated by the statute."

"In Chinatown this former condition was the prevailing one. All the older

structures stood, as it were, in hollows. The result needs no commentary. On King opposite Alapai street are buildings which not only violate the other provisions of section 4, as to height above ground of the floor timbers, but the underpinning is actually close-boarded, so that it is sealed against any air circulation whatever. The last line of section 4 says that where air space cannot be secured the floor shall be of concrete or masonry. This should be eliminated and air circulation under all buildings should be absolutely required."

Water-Tight Floors.

"Sections 5 and 6 are as follows: 'Yards, areas, courts, alleyways and other open spaces with or between buildings, where water is used for washing of any kind, shall be properly graded and cemented, or paved so as to be water proof, and drained into trapped drains properly connected with sewer or cesspool, and no permanent wooden floor or grating shall be maintained over the same.'

"All houses, structures, rooms or parts thereof, in which water is used, or intended to be used, in such quantity as to render the floor or floors thereof constantly damp, shall have such floor or floors, made absolutely water-proof, with proper drainage into trapped leaders conveying the water away into cesspool or sewer; and the water proofing of all such floors shall be done in a manner satisfactory to the Board of Health."

"With the waterproof floors, as ordered, and drainage to the present sewer system there would be a congestion of the latter by reason of the reckless use of water and its constant running which would soon be ruinous."

As to Made Land.

"Section 7 is as follows: 'No building or structure shall be used as a residence or place for human habitation or abode which is situated upon land where there is standing water within eighteen inches of the surface of the ground; nor shall any building or structure be so used that it is placed on land that has been made by filling in with refuse or garbage, or that is declared by the Board of Health to be of a corrupt material.'

"If this section was strictly enforced no building could be put up on the made lands south of Queen street and in the vicinity of South street. These lands are all filled in with refuse and garbage."

Cesspool Regulations.

Section 8 is as follows: No privy-vault, sink or cesspool in Honolulu shall hereafter be located or constructed within fifty feet of any stream, lake, pond, well or spring of water, nor within two feet of the line of any lot; nor shall it be made more than eighteen or less than six feet deep, or placed in such a position that it is not easily accessible for emptying and cleaning."

"This section is constantly violated. Only a day ago I saw a flagrant example of the freedom with which it is tossed aside by those who have no regard for health or the Board of Health. On River above Kukui street are three new houses at which the best-handled excavator could not get to empty the cesspools. They are so close to the street line and so close together that there is no driveway at all. These shacks have been thrown up in the last month, and I believe by the same Chinese gentleman whose premises in Nuuanu street furnished the biggest crop of plague patients."

Ventilating Cesspools.

"Section 9 is as follows: When deemed necessary by the Board of Health, the sides and bottom of any privy-vault, sink or cesspool shall be made either wholly or in part water-tight, so as to prevent any saturation of the ground about the said vault, sink or cesspool, and shall be provided with suitable ventilating arrangement."

"This section should have been amalgamated with section 8 and instead of there being an option with the Board of Health as to whether the cesspools must have suitable ventilating apparatus there should be an obligatory ventilating of every cesspool, without exception."

Are No Inspectors.

"Section 10, which reads as follows, has been violated fifty times since the statute was made: No structure or cover shall be put upon or over any privy-vault, sink or cesspool until it has been inspected by the proper agent of the Board of Health and approved as meeting the requirements of these regulations and of public health. The main reason is that even those willing to comply with the law would have no opportunity, as there is no inspector available and fit to look after its enforcement. To my certain knowledge plumbers every day put in traps and houses are built over them without any inspection."

Impossible to Comply.

"Section 13 requires an impossibility. Its text is as follows: Within thirty days after the public sewer system is put into operation the use of privy vaults and cesspools shall be entirely discontinued within the limits of such sewer system, and all privies shall be removed, except in so far as permission may be granted by the Board of Health to transform the same into approved water closets connected with the sewer system."

"It is amusing to one familiar with the portion of the city included in the section's provisions to estimate the miraculous power which would have to be exerted to comply with them. Conservative figures on the number of buildings affected by the section place them at 1,000, leaving out the area covered by the burned Chinatown district. A plumber will tell you that at least four days would be occupied in each of the thousand houses in putting in 'approved' water closets and connecting them with the sewer system. This would mean 4,000 days for all, or one year's steady work for from fifteen to eighteen plumbers. As there are only about twelve plumbers in town who could pass such an examination as would secure the community against imperfect jobs, the ridiculousness of section 13 is made apparent."

Real Plumbers Needed.

"On the need of competent plumbers in Honolulu a volume might be written. In 1898 the Legislature refused to pass a proposed plumbing law relative to the anticipated sewer construction. The bill was defeated; just how may not be told. There are now no legal qualifications for working plumbers. Any clumsy, untrained lout or inexperienced Asiatic can practice the trade and do bungling jobs, to the detriment of the community."

"In almost every other municipality of Honolulu's importance rigid laws compel a special education on the plumber's part. He must go through a stated apprenticeship and prove his ability before he is let loose on the public. The law that was proposed for Honolulu provided for strict examinations. Every master plumber who employed others was to be held responsible for every job he superintended and any defect found after the work was finished, no matter when, must be remedied by him or his license might be revoked. This would have given Honolulu protection from the wretched amateurs who now do much of the plumbing. Persons who seek to save a trifle employ incompetents for whose ignorance they pay dearly in sickness and endless bother."

Laws too Late.

"Again, these sanitary regulations were issued only last January. They ought to have been made when the sewer system plans were drawn. The many new residences which have been built in the past year or two would then have been erected with due regard for health."

"There is urgent need of legislation and enforcement of the sanitary laws in existence and the Board of Health could well afford now to probe into the matter when public interest is at fever heat."

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